

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

KAABA-TEXAS MINE REMOVAL

Nighthawk, Washington



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY REGION 10

October 1999

Beginning on October 4, 1999, The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is going to remove contaminated mine tailings from the Kaaba-Texas Mine. EPA classifies this as a "time critical removal." The tailings piles are located alongside the Similkameen River and are referred to as the Lower Bench tailings pile and the Riverbed tailings pile. When the wind blows or the river rises, these piles are eroded and blown by the wind and/or flow downstream, causing potential contaminant exposure to people, wildlife, and the environment. The work is planned as a one-time removal action; tailings will be collected and placed in a secure repository away from the river. EPA estimates the removal will take approximately three months to finish.

Site History and Conditions

The Kaaba-Texas Mine is approximately one half mile south of Nighthawk, a community in north central Washington, in Okanogan County. It is located on Alamandi Road, a sparsely-populated area on the west bank of the Similkameen River, in a mountainous landscape. Both residential and commercial properties exist in this area. The property is owned both privately and by the U.S. Federal Government (administered by the Bureau of Land Management). The mine is believed to have been established in the late 1890s, with operation and ownership changing hands several times before and after World War I. During World War II the mine was purchased by the Kaaba-Texas Mining Company. At that time the mine was producing greater than 100 tons of lead, silver, gold, copper and zinc ore per day. Tailings were discharged directly into

If you would like more information or would like to request a public meeting on this removal action, please contact:

Debra Packard
Community Involvement Coordinator
at (206) 553-0247
or toll free at
1-800-424-EPA, ext. 0247

the river until 1946, when the Okanogan County Health Department ordered the use of settling basins. Although basins were constructed, operational problems often caused overflows and direct discharge of tailings into the river.

Mining at the site stopped in 1951. In 1952 the land and mineral rights were sold to the Silver Star Mining Company. Silver Star continues to own the major portion of the property. In 1983 mineral rights were leased to Eastern Lights LTD, who conducted mineral exploration activities and constructed new settling basins. Eastern Lights, however, apparently did not conduct any mining activities. Silver Star states that it has never conducted any mining activities at the site and there appears to be no evidence of mining since Silver Star acquired the property.

Previous Investigations at the Site

In 1984 EPA conducted an investigation called a "Preliminary Assessment," collecting samples from the Lower Bench tailings pile. Analytical results indicated that lead, cadmium, silver, copper and zinc concentrations were approximately two times (for zinc) to nearly 6,000 times (for lead) greater than background levels. Additional sampling was conducted to evaluate the potential for various metals to leach from the tailings into the river water and to assess the possible impact tailings would have on water quality if a dam was constructed 8 miles downstream. Sampling results showed concentrations exceeding levels acceptable to EPA. Specifically, an analysis called an "elutriate analysis" indicated that potential leachate would contain metal concentrations that would exceed EPA Primary Drinking Water Standards.

In 1991 EPA collected samples of surface soil, subsurface soil and sediment from the mine site. Sample results indicated that elevated concentrations of arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, silver, cyanide and zinc remained in the Lower Bench tailings pile compared to background levels. The inspection concluded that the Lower Bench tailings pile could be considered entirely contaminated, the Riverbed tailings pile contained elevated levels of inorganics (non-metals which are byproducts of the mining process), and heavy metals were migrating to the wetland sediments located 50 feet downstream along the western bank of the Similkameen River.

1999 Work at the Site

In April 1999, EPA conducted a "removal site assessment," meaning site conditions were observed and samples collected to determine whether a removal action was needed. Eight samples were collected: four surface soil samples from the Lower Bench tailings pile and four sediment samples up and downstream of the Riverbed tailings pile.

Elevated levels of heavy metals were detected in both sets of samples, which, if not removed, could pose a risk to human health and the environment. Contaminants in the Similkameen River threaten water quality, which could harm sensitive steelhead and salmon populations, as well as impact human health through the food chain. In addition, wind blown dust from the contaminated tailings piles is an inhalation hazard to residents of Nighthawk and travelers on the Alamandi Road. Contaminated dust also poses a potential threat to the nearby bat caves and woodpeckers living in trees along the Similkameen River bank. It was determined that a removal action was necessary.

Next Steps

EPA will take the lead on the removal, with assistance from the Washington Department of Ecology and the Bureau of Land Management. In early October 1999, the contaminated mine tailings along the Similkameen River will be removed to a deep hole on site and covered with clean soil and rock. The dimensions of the hole will be calculated based on the amount of tailings in order to provide a safe repository. This will greatly reduce the chances of the contaminants eroding into the river or being inhaled, helping protect human health, wildlife, and the surrounding environment. EPA anticipates this will be a one-time removal, to be completed by December 1999.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Administrative Record and other documents with additional information about the Kaaba-Texas Mine Superfund Site will be available at:

Oroville Public Library
P.O. Box 550
Oroville, Washington 98844
(509) 476-2662

and

EPA Region 10
Seventh Floor Records Center
1200 Sixth Avenue, ECL-076
Seattle, Washington 98101
(206) 553-4494

If you have questions regarding activities at the Kaaba-Texas Mine site, please contact:

Michael Sibley

On Scene Coordinator

EPA Region 10

(206) 553-1886, or toll-free at 1-800-424-4372, ext. 1886

Carl Kitz

On Scene Coordinator

EPA Region 10

(206) 553-1671, or toll-free at 1-800-424-4372, ext. 1671

Debra Packard

Community Involvement Coordinator

EPA Region 10

(206) 553-0247, or toll-free at 1-800-424-4372, ext. 0247

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available by calling EPA's toll-free number at 1-800-424-4372.



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

EPA Region 10
Community Relations and Outreach
1200 Sixth Avenue, ECO-081
Seattle, Washington 98101-1128

SUPERFUND FACT SHEET

Kaaba-Texas Mine

Nighthawk, Washington